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*God's Blessing on the Use of
Mineral Waters.*

A
SERMON

Preach'd at the

CHAPEL

OF

TUNBRIDGE-WELLS,

Septemb. 6. 1702.

By WILLIAM NICHOLS, D. D.

Published at the Request of the Hearers.

L O N D O N:

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St. Paul's Church-Yard. MDCCII.



A
S E R M O N

Preach'd at the
Chapel of *Tunbridge-Wells*.

JOHN V. Ver. 4.

An Angel went down at a certain season into the Pool, and troubled the water : whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in, was made whole of whatsoever Disease he had.

The Context thus :

Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep-market, a Pool, which is called in the Hebrew Tongue, Bethesda, having five porches. In these, lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water, &c.

THIS passage of Scripture does relate to us an extraordinary Occurrence ; partly, in general, of a great number of Diseased Persons being Cured of their Distempers by the Be-

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nefit of Medicinal Waters; as likewise, in particular, of a poor impotent Man being freed by the miraculous Power of our Blessed Lord from an Infirmary he had laboured under for thirty years before; who for lack of Friends and Attendants about him, had long and in vain waited for an opportunity of putting in for a share in that common Relief. I shall wave at present speaking to this Beneficent Miracle of our Saviour, and shall only adapt my Discourse to that more ordinary way of Cure by the Waters of the Pool mentioned in the Text, which afforded a Remedy to such divers kinds of Diseases as are here related. And therefore the Subject of my present Discourse shall be limited to these following Particulars.

I. I shall shew as nigh as I can something of the Nature of the Waters of this famous Pool at *Jerusalem*, and what is meant by their being troubled by an Angel.

II. That not only these, but other Medicinal Waters, and the rest of the useful Remedies for Infirmities of human Bodies are under the particular Care and Direction of God's Providence.

III. I shall make some Applications to the Circumstances of us here present.

I. I shall shew as nigh as I can something of the Nature of the Waters of this famous Pool at *Jerusalem*, and what is probably meant by their being troubled by an Angel. Now

Now I do not take it that there is any necessity of asserting, that in this remarkable method of Healing by these Waters, there was a more particular Interposition of the Angelick Ministry than is usual in Medicinal Springs, and other Remedies which Nature provides for our Use. For it is observable, that the *Jews* had always a very Religious way of expressing themselves, attributing the common Productions and Occurrences of Nature, either immediately to God Almighty, or to the Ministry of his Holy Angels. Thus in Scripture, a *mighty Wind*, whose force exceeds that of ordinary Blasts, is called in the Original, *Rouach Elohim*, the *Wind of God*. So an extraordinary Mountain, whose Summits rise high into the Air, and overlook the tops of meaner Hills, is termed in Scripture *Langure*, *The Mountain of God*. So a pious Off-spring, is called, *The Sons of God*. In like manner are several of the Effects of Nature attributed to the Operation of God's Angels. For the Philosophy of the *Jews* was not, like ours, grounded upon Mechanical, but upon Pneumatick and Vital Principles. They did not explain the Phænomena of Nature by the Laws of Matter and Motion, and the Figuration of Corpuscles; but by the Energy of Dæmons or Angels actuating the Parts of Matter according to the wise Directions and Determinations of the Divine Wisdom. Thus when the Scriptural Writers lay down the Causes of a Pestilence or Epidemical Disease, they do not explain this direful Effect by ascribing it to poisonous Seeds latent in the Juices of Herbs and Plants, and at fixed Periods

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exerting themselves in the infecting the Blood of Animals; nor do they impute it, with others to the infectious Steams of Mineral Matter evaporating from the Earth; nor to Planetary Influxes; nor to the scorching unqualified Heat of the Sun; but to the Destroying Angel of God, armed with Vengeance, to punish the Sins of a wicked Nation, as we read, *Numb. 15. 46. 2 King. 24. 16.* Nay, the very Blasts of the ordinary Winds, and the Burning of the Fire, are attributed to the same Angelical Operations. *He maketh his Angels Winds, (says the Psalmist) and his Ministers Flames of Fire.*

In which passage, the Origin of Winds is not in our Philosophical Way attributed to the Evaporation of dry or watery Steams forcibly passing through the pent Caverns of the Earth, or to the violent Agitation of the Air; but to Angelick Powers giving the first impressions to the little Parts which compose our Atmosphere, and compelling them into those gentle or rapid Motions which Form the Breezes or Storms, which we experience among us. And the same Text informs us, That, according to the Rules of this Pneumatick Philosophy of the *Jews*, The Burning of the Fire is not to be imputed to the Agitation of *Æther*, or subtile Matter freeing and dislodging it self from the cloggs of the Grosser, and by violence of its Motion, shattering the Compages of such bulky Bodies into their first constituent Parts; but to an Angelick Energy, which impels those innumerable little Parts, into that
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brisk and nimble Motion which is discernable in Light and Heat. For these Reasons, I conclude, That the Medicinal Quality of the Waters mentioned in the Text is attributed likewise to an Angelical Power; which, according to the Jewish Philosophy, was the first Principle of all the grand Occurrences and Phænomena of Nature. Though, to speak in our way, it is not improbable that this Pool was any more than a sort of *Therma*, or Hot-Bath, heated by the Inflammation of sulphureous or bituminous Matter which abounds much in the Country of *Judea*, as is yet discernable in the Lake *Asphaltites*; tho' the Springs of this particular Pond may be at present choaked up by the Ruins of that famous City. And whereas it is said, *That at a certain Season, κατὰ καιρὸν*, at a particular Revolution of Time, the Angel troubled the Waters: This is but answerable to the periodical Ebullitions of such Springs. *Pliny* the younger, I remember has not an unlike Expression of such a Spring in *Italy*, *Statis dimensisque momentis augetur & diminuitur*; It rises and falls at a particular Minute: *Et phialas refert quæcum singultibus sistunt quod effundunt*: And imitates the Gulping of Water out of a Vial, which with Sobs do stop that which they pour out. This in all probability was the troubling of the Waters; which if it happened once in twelve hours, it might depend upon the Southing of the Moon, which is the general Cause of the Flux and Reflex of the Sea; So that this Spring, as several others in the World

do, did communicate by subterraneous Passages with the Ocean : Or, if the Periodical Swelling or E-bullition was different from this, as is most probable it might be owing to the Accension of subterraneous Vapours at certain Seasons of the Year. And this I presume it pleased God Almighty to make use of as a Second Cause, in conferring the Benefit of those Medicinal Waters to the Jewish People at that time. Not that I think the particular Interposition of Angelick Powers and other Miraculous Occurrences were unusual among the *Jews*, for nothing was more frequent than God's indulging to them such Favours in former times ; but it is not observable that they had any standing Miracle among them under the Second Temple, when the *Urim* and *Thummim* and *Schekinah*, &c. ceased. Nay, I am so far from thinking that there was nothing of Angelick Ministry in conferring this Beneficent Effect on the Waters of *Bethesda*, that I think there is no Cure of human Bodies wrought without something of it ; more of which I shall speak to under the next Head. I now proceed to the Second thing I proposed to shew,

II. That not not only these but other Medicinal Waters, and the rest of useful Remedies for the Infirmities of human Bodies, are under the particular Care and Direction of God's Providence ; which appears, Because,

1. The Health of our Bodies is the most considerable Good, which Providence can bestow upon us in this World.

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2. Unless Providence were not concerned in our Health, other great Designs of Providence would be obstructed.

We are Taught by God's Word, That the Holy Angels are the peculiar Administrators of the Divine Will, and what his All-wise Providence does Dictate, it is their Office to Execute. And it is particularly plain, That they are most nighly concerned in the Welfare of human Kind, especially of good Christians. God has promised to give *his Angels charge of us to keep us in all our ways.* That they are *Ministring Spirits set forth to Minister unto them that are Heirs of Salvation.* That they are Guardians even to the Persons of little Children, who have in Heaven *their Angels which do behold the Face of God continually, Matth. 18. 10.* We are likewise Taught, That there is not a *Hair of our Head falls to the Ground* without God's Knowledge: That to him *belong the Issues of Life and Death; That he maketh our Beauty to Consume away like as it were a Moth, fretting a Garment:* And when he pleaseth, *reneweth our Youth, and maketh us young and lusty like an Eagle.*

Now if the good Angels of God do so continually take Care of us, and defend us from Dangers; this Care and Protection can never be more considerably employed in our behalf, than in Matters relating to our Health. For

a healthy Constitution is the best of Possessions: 'Tis that which gives a Gust and Relish to all the Satisfactions of this World; and therefore this must be one of the first Things which those Blessed Spirits can be inclined to secure for us, whilst they are prosecuting our Welfare and Happiness. And so likewise if they defend us from Dangers, they must defend us from Sicknes; for Sicknes is the worst of Dangers: so that it must be one of the most principal Parts of their Ministry to defend us from That.

Now if we were able to take a look into the Invisible World, we might there see how busie those Friendly Spirits are in keeping our Bodies from noxious Objects, in leading our Fancies to things agreeable to our Constitution, and in diverting our Desires from prejudicial Pleasures; in persuading us for our Advantage, to overcome our Aversion to offensive Drugs, and to comply with our Physicians Advice; in improving his learned Skill, in adapting his Remedies more nicely agreeable to our Distempers, and all along directing and assisting the Medicinal Hand. And I doubt not, but we might then discover, with what a kind Officiousness they assist in the Application of the Medical Waters of this Place: How they by gentle Influences persuade Distempered Persons from the remotest distance, to repair to this *Bethesda*: How they suggest Reasons to many to conquer the Prejudices raised by ignorant Persons against them: How they draw others to this

this Remedy by laying before them the Consideration of their conflicting so long with a lingering and painful Disease, which has baffled the Efficacy of other Medicines, and wearied out their Constancy, and made their Nature averse to the nauseous Repetition of them; by inviting others to this successful Application by the pleasurable Diversions of the Place, and causing them happily to find their Cure where they sought only an Entertainment: And lastly, Instating them in Health and Vigour, by opening to the Mineral Virtue a more easie passage into the Blood, for the Secretion of noxious Humours, and for the enlivening it with a new and a noble Flame. These are as certain and as beneficial Effects of the Angelical Ministry, as if an Angel, according to the literal Words of the Text, *troubled our Water*, and we saw every Morning such a glorious Spirit, *in his glittering Robe of Light, visibly descending from above*; and impregating the Basin with a Coal from the Altar of Heaven.

And if these kind Æthereal Minds are disposed to Befriend us with so much Care and Tendernefs, we may be sure of as much Favour and Indulgence from Almighty God himself, the Great *Father of Spirits, the Author of all Goodness, and the God of all Comfort*. He that *gives us all good Things richly to Enjoy*, will never be wanting to us in affording us Means, and Blessing all Endeavours towards the Recovery of our Health, without which we

can enjoy nothing else; unless we by our Sins obstruct his Favours, or God has greater Advantage for us in pursuit, by his continuing our Affliction upon us.

If Men would but take a like Care to preserve Health in themselves, as God is to recover it to them when lost, by affording Remedies always at hand, and giving a Blessing to the Application of them; I am sure there would not be a quarter of those Indispositions in the World, which we now find Men complaining of.

Whatever hard Thoughts some Men may conceive of God's Providence, in suffering so many several Diseases to harass Mankind; God's Justice is not only excuseable by the Original Corruption of human Nature, and by Men's actual Transgressions; but the greatest part of the long Catalogue of Distempers which are incident to our own Species, Men by their own Indiscretion pull upon them themselves, and by their intemperate and luxurious way of Living, make Mankind far more Miserable than the Fall of *Adam* left it. Human Nature, mortal as it is, if it was not for Indulging foolish and insipid Pleasures, and oppressing and overcharging her with Surfeits and Riots, would go for the generality peaceably off of the Stage, Men would Enjoy a long and a healthy Life, and make a passage into the other World by an easie Death. But when Men do so frequently by a Strain put upon their Nature, break and enervate their
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Constitution, and by their own Folly, open Sluces upon themselves, and let in a whole torrent of Diseases by their own Vices; and yet notwithstanding all this, God is still graciously pleased to suffer them to reap the Benefit of healing Herbs and Minerals, and to give them a share in the Success of the Physicians Art, whom God has raised up to be Instruments of his Providence; when at the same time by an unguarded Course of Life they are labouring against their own Advantage, to render the Medical Maxims and Directions ineffectual, and oftentimes provoking the Goodness of God whilst it is succouring them: This is an instance only of the unspeakable Mercy and Goodness of our gracious God, who maketh his Sun to shine upon the Evil and upon the Good.

2. Because, If Providence were not concerned in our Health, other great Designs which Providence has in view would be obstructed.

All Men's Reason must assent to this Truth, That whenever God Wills the End, he Wills the Means which he is pleased to bring about that End by. So that if God does design Sickly or Distempered Persons to be such Instruments of his Providence, as Health is requisite to qualifie them for; God must particularly concern himself in the Restoration of that Health, which is so necessary for that End. As for instance, Suppose that God designed the Erection
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of the *Grecian* Empire for a Scourge of the Sins of the *Eastern* Nations ; for the diffusing all over the World the use of the *Greek* Tongue, for the easier propagating the Gospel ; or for any one or more Wise Ends unknown to us. Now when it happened, That *Alexander the Great*, the Founder of that Monarchy, fell Sick of a dangerous Fever, just as he was marching against *Darius* his Army ; Don't you think that his Recovery was brought about by the special Direction and Interposition of Providence ? For if this couragious young Prince had happened to have miscarried, the *Macedonians* would have despaired of the Success of that Enterprize ; and would have been so far from Conquering the *Persians*, that in all probability they would have been swallowed up by them. Nay, the very Sickness of *Alexander* causing the *Greek* Army to make a Halt for three or four days, gave *Darius's* Forces the unfortunate opportunity of marching forwards into the Streights of a thick Wood, where they met their Enemy ; in which their innumerable Troops, having no room to draw out themselves, were totally routed by a handful of Men ; who, if it had not been for this unforeseen Act of Providence, had been surrounded by those vast multitudes, and to a Man, destroyed upon the first Onset. Nor must it be thought thar God Almighty does concern himself only in the Welfare of such Eminent Personages as this Prince, by whose Actions he had such mighty Designs to bring about ; but even

even the Life of every mean and little Person is so interwoven into the Designs of Providence, that God will not part with such a life out of the World till those Wise Ends are accomplished by it which he has forecast. Many an eminent Inventor or Improver of useful Arts have been unexpectedly recovered from dangerous Fits of Sickness, and God has afterwards afforded them long Lives to Bless the World by their Beneficial Labours. Many a painful Minister of *Jesus Christ* has, by the Mercy of God, been snatched back from the very Brink of the Grave, that he might be an Instrument under God of gaining Souls, and converting Sinners from the Evil of their way. Nay, There is hardly a Person in the World but is descended from an Ancestor who has laboured under some very dangerous Distemper, which it has pleased God to deliver him from; that the numerous Offspring, which he had fore-ordained should proceed from his Loyns, might come into the World. For this End, as the Scripture informs us, *God opened the Wombs of Sarah and Rachel*, by which they became the Parents of such a mighty Progeny: And God for the same wise Reasons does still continue, when he thinks fit, oftentimes by assisting the Medical Qualities of these Waters, to make *the Barren Woman keep House, and be a Joyful-Mother of Children*. This I think is sufficient to Evince, That God, either by the Ministry of his Holy Angels, or his own immediate Interposition, does give a Blessing

to successful Remedies, and help on the Cure of those Distempers Men recover from. I now proceed to the third Thing I proposed.

III. To make some Applications proper to the Circumstances of us here present.

1. Since therefore we are met together in this celebrated Place, in hopes to receive the Blessing of God upon us, in either Restoring or Confirming our Healths ; let us take Care to maintain among our selves, an easie and friendly Conversation. For since it is necessary for a just Operation of this gentle and natural Medicine, that the Patients do Sequester themselves from Business and Study, and unbend their Minds, as much as may be, from severe Thought and eager Application ; A great part of the day must be taken up in Conversation and Discourse, which we ought to endeavour to render as agreeable and entertaining as possibly we can to the Company we Confort with ; to the end, that by the Charms of an endearing Conversation we may sweeten the fatigue of so long a Leisure, and by entertaining the Minds of each other with fresh Scenes of delightful Thoughts, we may make the Waters of the Place to have a more powerful Influence upon our Bodies. Therefore we must divest our selves of all Moroseness of Temper, and Sullenness of Behaviour ; and if we be not naturally disposed to Mirth and Pleasantness, we should put a force upon
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our Natures by a particular Application; we should give a new spring to our Minds; and purposely lay out our Thoughts to speak Things taking and agreeable to our Friends; whether it be in the way of Relation of delightful Matters of Fact, or by the harmless Reflections and the sportive Sallies of a well-natur'd Wit.

Now in order to such a good Humour'd and peaceable Conversation, we must take Care in the first place to avoid all Party-Disputes in our Discourse, which serve only to inflame and rancour Men's Spirits, and to soure Conversation: For, in this Place of general resort, Men are as it were Citizens of the whole World; they belong to no particular Division or Party; or rather they are all Incorporated for the Season into one particular Family or Brotherhood; and therefore ought to live together with the like Love and Friendship.

And in the next place, To avoid all contumelious Reflections upon the Company, whether it be by verbal Affronts, or especially by defamatory Writings; which Actions, as they do particularly disturb the Happiness of such mixed Societies, so in the wisest Nations they have been look'd upon as the most scandalous and base, and fit only for their Slaves and sordid Wits. And I may speak it for the Honour of our Nation, That of late years, fewer Lampoons and scurrilous Libels have been wrote amongst us;

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and fewer encouraged than in most other Nations: Ingenious Men are become truly sensible, how sorry a part of Wit it is to scratch and tear; how unmanly and cowardly it is to wound Persons by an unknown Hand, in the Back, and in the dark; and to be guilty of an Action which they are either ashamed or afraid to own.

2. We ought to be constant in our Devotions, and to give our attendance Morning and Evening at the publick Service of the Church. Whilst a great many of the Persons here present are at home taken up with the hurry which their Employments engage them in, and are distracted by a multiplicity of wordly Business; God Almighty may Excuse them for a less frequent attendance on the daily Worship of God in Publick. But, in this Place, where all of us enjoy so great a Leisure, and Time is so far from being wanting to us, that for the most part it uncomfortably hangs upon our Hands; Our fault is, inexcuseable, if we grudge to offer up to God so small a Portion of our Time as this Exercise requires; especially, when we lavishly lay out so much greater a share of it in frothy Pleasures, and are forced to call in any idle Vanity, which offers it self, to pass it away. But furthermore, when we consider, we must have God's Blessing upon us to make the Means successful which we Use for the Recovery or Preservation of our Health; we can have little
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reason to expect that God should confer that favour upon us, which we will not vouchsafe to ask of him. With what Confidence can we presume that God should Befriend us with Health, the greatest of Blessings which this World affords, whilst we slight and contemn his Worship? God has promised, *That those who Honour him he will Honour*; that when his faithful Servants come unto him in their Trouble, he will hear them, and that he will grant the Requests of those that ask in his Sons Name; but as for wicked and irreligious People, they in a manner live out of the Verge of God's Care; and though he may recover their Healths, and prolong their Lives, it is only out of a merciful Kindness to give them a further space for Repentance; or else he defends, as Governments maintain Malefactors, for a while, in order for a more publick and solemn Execution.

3. Another Duty incumbent upon us, whilst we are expecting the Benefits of this Place, is Charity. I do not mean that of Opinion, but an actual Distribution of a part of the good Things of this World, which God has plentifully afforded us, for the Relief of those who stand in need of them; and for other Religious Uses. When it has pleased God of his Mercy to afford us a means here of recovering or establishing our Health, we ought to pay the

justest Gratitude to him which our Faculties are capable of shewing. Now as God is an All-sufficient Being, and stands in no need of our Requital ; so he expects we should Discharge, as much as in us lies, the Debts due to him unto his poor Servants ; their Hunger and their Thirst, and all their Wants, he has deem'd his own ; and all the Friendly Offices which we do to them, he has declared he will take as kindly as if they were done to himself. Indeed, I am prevented from saying much upon this Head, by your generous Charity already shewn in your ready Contributions for the School of this Place, whereby so many poor Children are Educated to good Letters and True Religion, and the sound Doctrine and Principles of the established Church. But one particular Branch of Charity the Course of the Day calls me to speak to, and that is your ready Contribution towards the maintaining the Ministerial Offices throughout the Year in this Place. You that have partaken of the Benefits of these Mineral Waters, and have drawn so many poor Families to be your Attendants during the Season, the least you can do for them, is by your Contributions, to take Care they have the Service of God constantly performed among them, throughout the remaining part of the Year. And since it has pleased God to hear the Prayers which the Minister for this Congregation has put up in your behalf, you ought not to dismiss him without a Prophet's Reward.

Reward. If Persons of other Communions, tho' of mean Fortunes, and within a narrow compass, can raise from Contributions for their Pastors, an Income equal to the most desirable of our established Preferments; let it not be said, that so noble a Concourse of eminent Persons from all Parts of the Nation, shall with difficulty raise a scanty Maintenance for the Minister of this celebrated Place. And I beseech you to consider that of the Apostle, 1 Cor. 9. 11. *If we have sown unto you spiritual things, Is it a great matter if we reap your worldly things? Do ye not know, that they who Minister about holy things, live of the sacrifice? and they who wait at the Altar are partakers with the Altar? Even-so hath the Lord also ordained, that they who preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel.*

Fourthly and Lastly, I beg leave to recommend one thing more to those who have received Advantage as to their Health from the Waters of the Place; and that is, to let their Lives be answerable to the Benefit God has vouchsafed them thereby. This is the particular Advice our Blessed Lord gave to the Lame Person he Cured at the Pool of Bethesda, *Sin no more lest a worse thing come unto thee.* If we make an ungrateful Return to God by violating his Laws after such a Favour received, we must certainly expect that God will visit us with the same Affliction again, or send a greater Plague in its room, ei-
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ther now or hereafter. But I pray God to give us Grace that none of us be guilty of so foul an Ingratitude, but that we may all live Lives answerable to our Holy Profession ; that we may so work out our Salvation with Fear and Trembling in this World, that in the other we may all meet together again at the great *Supper of the Lamb*, where we shall *freely drink of the Water of Life* to all Eternity. Which God, &c.

F I N I S.

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Q U A R T O.

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